

**Vermont Position Paper on Permanence**  
**DCF Family Services Division**  
**April 26, 2012**

**From the Family Services Practice Model:**

Permanence: Children have enduring relationships with healthy nurturing families.

- Planning for children's permanence is considered at every stage of decision making
- When children cannot live safely with their families, the first consideration for placement is with kinship connections capable of providing a safe and nurturing home.
- Life-long connections are critical for children. We strive to promote and preserve family, kinship, sibling and community connections for each child.
- Permanence is best achieved through a legal relationship such as reunification with parents, adoption, or guardianship.

**Introduction and Definition**

The belief and value that every child and young person deserves a permanent family<sup>1</sup> relationship is paramount in this work. A child/youth in out of home care has an urgent need to know where he/she belongs. To that end, planning for permanence in social work is youth-driven, family-focused, culturally competent, continuous, and approached with the highest degree of urgency. Permanence is achieved with a family relationship that offers safe, stable, and committed parenting, unconditional love and lifelong support, and legal family membership status. Permanence can be the result of preservation of the family, reunification with birth or adoptive family, permanent guardianship<sup>2</sup> and/or adoption by kin, fictive kin, or other caring and committed adults.

For young people, planning for permanence begins at case opening and is ongoing for the life of a case. Child welfare agencies, in partnership with the larger community, have a moral and professional responsibility to find and facilitate permanent family relationships for each child and young person.

Permanence involves establishing lifelong, unconditional reciprocal positive family relationships, including with siblings the child or youth may have. Plans designed to last only until the youth reaches that age of 18 are not permanent plans.

Permanence should bring physical, emotional and whenever possible legal security within the context of family relationships and allow multiple relationships with a variety of caring adults including maternal, paternal, and sibling relationships. Permanence is a commitment that adults make to the well being of children and youth over a lifetime. For young people, embracing permanence is a non-linear developmental

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<sup>1</sup> Family is defined as any group of people related either biologically, emotionally, and/or legally.

<sup>2</sup> Policy allows for other solutions that offer lesser legal permanence. For example, transfer of custody or guardianship through Probate.

process.<sup>3</sup> Permanence includes opportunities for children/youth to learn the array of life skills necessary to become independent and interdependent adults. This occurs best within the context of family. Ensuring that children and youth have both permanent relationships AND life skills for independence are critical to future well-being.<sup>4</sup> See: Youth Development Position Paper

The Family Services Division is committed to sharing our expertise in permanence practice across the Agency of Human Services, when requested.

## Philosophy and Principles

This position paper on permanence is built upon the following list of principles. These principles express the overarching values that must guide all policies, programs, practices, services, and supports for children/youth. They are interrelated and work together in a dynamic, synergistic way. The order of their presentation here reflects neither a preferential order nor each principle's respective worth or relevance. Each principle is critical and should be reflected in all policies, practice guidance, programs, services, and supports of the agency.

Our principles:

1. Every child/youth is entitled to a permanent family relationship.
2. Permanence refers to those family and community connections that contribute to healthy physical, social, and emotional development. These include:
  - a stable, healthy and lasting living situation within the context of a family relationship with at least one committed adult;
  - reliable, continuous, and healthy connections with siblings, birth parents, extended family and a network of other significant adults;
  - education and/or employment, life skills, supports, and services. See FSD practice model Tools for Engagement
3. If we suspect a child will require out of home placement, we should begin early, consistently, and with a sense of urgency to widen our search for extended family within the child's expanding community and culture.
4. These permanent family relationships are identified and supported through cross systems collaboration and the alignment of social work and contracted support.
5. Children/youth are actively involved in planning for their permanence in a way that is appropriate developmentally and emotionally. See practice guidance for case planning Adolescents need to be actively engaged in identifying past and present connections that can be explored as potential permanent resources. Youth age 18 or older are informed by their social worker that they can still be adopted as an adult. Adult adoption requires the consent of the adoptee and the adoptive parent(s).<sup>5 6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> An Examination of Theory and Promising Practice for Achieving Permanency for Teens Before They Age out of Foster Care, Avery, Rosemary, Children and Youth Services Review, 32 (2010) 399-408.

<sup>4</sup> Same as above different page

<sup>5</sup> Unpacking the "No" of Permanency for Older Adolescents. National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections at the Hunter College School of Social Work, <http://nytdcommunity.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/Unpacking%20the%20No.ppt#287,1>,

6. Children, youth, and their family systems must be involved in understanding their own strengths and needs. Efforts towards permanence recognize and build upon assets and resilience of young people, their parents, extended families, and other significant adults.<sup>7</sup>
7. Planning for children/youth's permanence is considered at every stage of decision making over the life of a case and means that:
  - efforts to achieve timely permanence begin through strengthening families whenever possible. **See PG for High Risk Non Custody Families**
  - reunification with the young person's family<sup>8</sup> must begin as soon as the young person is placed out of home while engaging in contingency planning with resource families. **See PG Concurrent Planning**
  - efforts to achieve permanence respect the culture, race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation and religious/spiritual background of children/youth and their families.
8. Efforts to achieve permanence ensure that services and supports are provided in ways that are transparent, responsive, and accountable to children, youth, and their families.
  - Transparency means full disclosure to the child's family<sup>6</sup> and resource families at the onset of services regarding the need for the child/youth permanence and includes information about federally mandated time frames.
  - Being responsive means using the full range of tools for family engagement. **See FSD Practice Model**
  - Accountability is a balance of commitment between families, youth, social workers, and service providers. It means following through with commitments to meet the child/youth's need for permanence.
9. The achievement of permanence is a process not an event. Helping children to achieve lasting permanence requires a commitment to adequate preparation for children, youth and families, as well as ongoing support, as needed.

## Outcome and Indicators

The following is a brief list of outcome and measures and indicators that we use to evaluate our progress towards achieving and maintaining permanence for young people.

1. **Participation:** We will increase the number and percentage of children, youth, and their families who report that they actively participate in their own case planning and decision-making.<sup>9</sup>
2. **Increased Knowledge and Community Awareness:** We will increase preparation, training, education and/or support that is provided about permanence for young people to key constituency groups such as: children/youth, families and extended families, agency staff,

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<sup>6</sup> "Actively involved" means that the agency consulted with the child (as developmentally appropriate) regarding the child's goals and services, explained the plan and terms used in the plan in language that the child can understand, and included the child in periodic case planning meetings, particularly if any changes are being considered in the plan.

<sup>7</sup> Strengthening Families; Center for the Study of Social Policy

<sup>8</sup> Family refers to that family which holds residual parental rights or may have been a guardian for the child.

<sup>9</sup> A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood. Annie E. Casey Foundation, [http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/casey\\_permanency\\_0505.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/casey_permanency_0505.pdf) (2005)

courts, attorneys, schools, probation officers, facility case workers, community providers and other key partners as determined by the young people or the Department for Children and Families.

3. Placement Settings:

- a. We will decrease the number and percentage of children/youth in residential settings.
- b. We will decrease the length of stay of children/youth in residential settings. Note: Attention should be paid to how SW request residential assessments and to treatment plans which include family involvement for reunification. (NCIC data evaluation team?)
- c. We will increase the number of children placed with kin.

4. Placement Stability:

- a. We will decrease the number of moves children/youth experience in out of home care.

5. Legal Permanence:

- a. We will increase in the number and percentage of children/youth who achieve legal family permanence through reunification, adoption, or guardianship.
- b. We will increase the number of children who find permanence with Kin.
- c. We will decrease the length of time children/youth remain in DCF custody.
- d. We will decrease the number of children/youth who re-enter DCF custody.

6. Employee Value on Permanence: We will increase the number of Social workers who indicate a belief that permanence can be achieved for all children/youth. Refer to the Survey of Employee Engagement (SEE)

### **Research and Source Materials**

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